

# Department of Human Services

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\*Important story at this spot

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## Twin girls testify against their adoptive mother in 'torture' case

By Jameson Cook  
Journal Register News Service

Eight-year-old twin girls testified Friday that their adoptive mother hit, beat, burned and hanged them with an exercise device, cable cord and other items over about 1-1/2 years.

"Where were you hit?" asked assistant Macomb prosecutor Jennifer Andary to one of the girls during the torture and child abuse trial of Tamika S. Williams, 30, of Warren.

"Everywhere," the girl replied, "on my back, my legs, my arms, my face."

"Did she say why?" Andary asked.

"Because she hated us," the girl said.

The twins testified over several hours Friday afternoon in the Macomb County Circuit Court courtroom of Judge Mary Chrzanowski, in a case that Warren police officials said is the worst child abuse case they have seen. After the trial, state officials are expected to terminate her parental rights.

The second girl's testimony took place in a partially closed courtroom after she indicated she was afraid to sit in the witness box in the open courtroom. Chrzanowski cleared the courtroom of spectators, with attorneys on both sides, a detective, the defendant, the jury and court officers remaining in attendance. Newspaper reporters watched the second girl's testimony on a video and audio tape in a conference room in court chambers.

Williams faces a potential maximum penalty of life in prison if convicted; she is charged with two counts of torture and two counts of first-degree child abuse.

The second girl testified late Friday afternoon that the abuse occurred in the kitchen, the hallway and two rooms.

She also said her mother attempted to hang her "about nine" times. On Andary's request, the girl stepped off the witness stand and went to a door in the courtroom to demonstrate how Williams hanged her with a rope.

"She put rope around my neck and tied it to the door," using "some kind of hook," she said.

"Could you breathe?" Andary asked.

"No," the girl said.

Williams also used the rope to tie her and her sister to the bed, she said.

The second girl pointed to the back of her hand and said Williams burned her there with a "flat iron," as well as with cigarettes.

"The scar is gone now because I put medicine on it," she said.

The second girl volunteered to show Andary a scar on or near her lower lip.

The second girl said Williams hit her sister "over the head with a glass table."

She said Williams hit her with a shoe, hanger, a paddle and an "exercise thing" that the first girl called the "spring."

When the exercise device was shown to the first girl who testified, the girl covered her face with her hands in apparent fear and at first wouldn't look at it.

Both girls said that when Williams bathed them once a month, she put bleach in the water.

The two girls lived with Williams for about three years, but the alleged beatings didn't start until a few weeks after Williams formally adopted them in April 2005, according to testimony. The second girl testified that she didn't fear her adoptive mother until "the first day when she punched us."

"She got mad because I thought she said to get black pants for me and (her sister) but she said to get blue pants," the second girl said. "She just punched me and (her sister) in the eye."

The girls never told anyone about the beatings, the second girl testified, because Williams threatened them.

"She said if we told somebody we would be killed," she said.

"How did that make you feel?" Andary asked.

"Bad," the girl answered.

The first girl testified that Williams "hated us" and "said she would drive into a pole and kill us all."

Even though Williams bought new bunk beds for the girls, they only slept in them once because the girls misbehaved so had to sleep on the floor in separate rooms, the second girl testified.

Upon questioning by Andary, the second girl said her reason for testifying was so she "won't have to go back" and live with Williams. Both girls have been living with a new family for about six months after they were removed from the Williams home on Toepfer Road on or about Nov. 16.

The second girl said she liked the new family because they bought her new clothes, but after questioned by Andary said that was not the reason she was testifying.

When the defense begins its case next week, Williams is expected to claim the injuries were caused by others or the girls, and that the girls are lying.

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[http://www.dailytribune.com/stories/060307/loc\\_torture001.shtml](http://www.dailytribune.com/stories/060307/loc_torture001.shtml)

# the SOURCE

## Utica mom gets probation

By CHRIS WILLIAMS  
Source Staff Writer

A Utica mother accused of willfully letting her 14-year-old daughter be involved with a 21-year-old man will receive probation instead of jail time after prosecutors lowered the charges against her.

Tammy Fennell, 35, pleaded no contest to charges of fourth-degree child abuse on May 24 in 41-A District Court. Prosecutors charged that Fennell had been aware of a year-long sexual relationship between her teenage daughter and 21-year-old Christopher Garcia, which led to the teenager's pregnancy.

Fennell was charged in April with second-degree child abuse. Although the daughter testified that her mother had no knowledge of the relationship, prosecutors disagreed and said Fennell had put her daughter in harm's way by allowing the relationship to continue. The daughter is now four months pregnant with Gracia's child.

The charges were reduced to fourth-degree child abuse after Macomb County Assistant Prosecutor Molly Zappitell said she was not sure the definitions of the higher charge applied to the Fennell's situation.

"Second-degree child abuse is basically gross negligence in action which leads to a serious injury, like you would see with shaken baby syndrome. We were not sure if this would meet the definition of a serious injury and obviously some people would argue that a pregnancy is not an injury at all, but we contended that with the daughter being this young, it was," Zappitell said. "Fourth-degree is for gross negligence with an injury, rather than a serious injury."

District Judge Douglas P. Shepherd sentenced Fennell to two years of probation; she was also sentenced to 30 days in prison, which was credited for time served. She is allowed to have supervised visits with her daughter, who is currently in foster care.

"We put her on the maximum probation allowed," Zappitell said. "She is allowed supervised visits with her daughter as Department of Human Services sees fit, but she does have to go to mandatory drug testing and meet their guidelines."

Zappitell said the daughter, who made headlines over a year ago when she was found in a car with a 25-year-old Indiana man she met on the Internet, is having a difficult time adjusting to the foster care environment.

"She doesn't like restrictions," Zappitell said. "She's used to having this free lifestyle and she doesn't like having limits on her."

Garcia is scheduled to appear in Circuit Court on June 5. James Przeadski, 21, who was also alleged to have been involved with the teenage girl, recently pleaded guilty to a lesser charge and is scheduled for sentencing June 14.

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## THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

### After 2nd blaze endangers kids, mom admits neglect

Woman's baby died in January house fire

Friday, June 01, 2007

**BY SUSAN L. OPPAT**

**News Staff Reporter**

An Ypsilanti Township woman who lost her son in a fire in January admitted in Washtenaw Juvenile Court Wednesday to neglect charges after her three surviving children narrowly escaped another fire in March.

Latasha Wingard, 25, avoided a trial on the Department of Human Services petition. She faces a hearing June 20 when she'll learn what steps she must take to regain custody of Natasha Jenkins, 7, Aaliyah Jenkins, 6, and Larryah Hunter, 4.

She temporarily lost custody on April 17, following a March 16 incident in which a neighbor had to carry her out of her burning apartment at 6:45 a.m. because she was unconscious and smelled of alcohol, authorities said. She later became combative with rescue workers, according to reports, and denied there had been a fire. Firefighters said the fire started on the stove.

Her son, Larry Hunter, 2, died Jan. 31 in a 4:30 a.m. fire that destroyed the house she was renting. In that incident, Wingard told firefighters she was using the oven to heat the house because the furnace wasn't working.

After she lost custody of the girls, she was arrested in Pittsfield Township last month on suspicion of driving on a suspended license and drunken driving.

Assistant Prosecutor Don Ray said Thursday that Wingard continues to have visitation rights with her children, who are staying with her mother, but that she is not allowed to drive them anywhere because of the new arrest.

He said Wingard could be ordered to undergo substance abuse treatment and pass parenting classes to regain custody of the girls.

Susan Oppat can be reached at [soppat@annarbornews.com](mailto:soppat@annarbornews.com) or at 734-482-1166.

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Published June 3, 2007

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## Child abuse and neglect cases on rise in the county

By MARY JO WHITE  
Lansing Community Newspapers

EATON COUNTY — There's good news and bad news for Eaton County in the annual Kids' Count review recently released by the Michigan League for Human Services.

The good news is that the child poverty rate and the number of teen parents are dropping; the bad news is that the level of abuse and neglect is on the rise.

Kids' Count is a collaborative project of MLHS and Michigan's Children.

Child poverty rate in the county declined between 1997 and 2003, and has remained below the state rate.

Births to teen mothers have dropped, too, from 127 per thousand in the three-year period of 1995-97 to 117 per thousand from 2002 through 2004.

Kids in Eaton County are being protected from infectious diseases. Almost three-quarters — 73.6 percent — of Eaton County toddlers were immunized in 2005, well above the Michigan rate of 63.9 percent.

This reflects the required minimal doses for kindergarten or preschool entry: four diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, three polio, one measles, three flu, three Hepatitis B and one chickenpox.

The county's low birth weight figure remained constant at 7.3 percent of births between 1995-97 and 2002-04, but Eaton still ranked only 46th among the Michigan counties.

Low birth weight means babies who weighed less than 5 lb. 8 oz.

The infant mortality figures worsened, though, from five per 100,000 in 1995-97 to six in 2002-04.

Even though the child poverty rates are declining, significantly more kids in the county are receiving Medicaid coverage, food stamps and subsidized or free school lunches.

Part of the reason is that jobs developed locally often lack health insurance, said Michele Corey, community advocacy director for Michigan's Children.

"A bit of it is how marginally people are living," Corey says. "Also, there's been a recognition that the poverty line isn't at a level that allows self-sufficiency."

Food stamp eligibility starts at 130 percent of poverty and Medicaid coverage at 150 percent, 185 percent for infants.

## Abuse crimes rise

Perhaps the most striking piece of news was the increase in the number of confirmed victims of abuse or neglect, from 78 per 1,000 in 1997 to over 290 per 1,000 in 2005.

This may be partly due to increased reporting, as the number of children investigated more than doubled in the same period.

Even so, the rate of confirmed cases grew more than the number of children investigated.

There's definitely more awareness of abuse and neglect now, according to Corey.

"What it looks like to me," she says, "is that the 2005 figure is more realistic. Maybe there was an underestimation before."

Cheryl Krapf-Haddock, director of the Eaton County Child Abuse and Neglect Council, credits Bubbylonian Encounter, a program that teaches kids about good touch, bad touch and forced sexual touch.

"Every year after Bubbylonian Encounter, there are children who come forward to report," she said.

"With better education there's better reporting."

The large increase is probably also partly the result of a comprehensive legislative change in 1998, according to Eaton County prosecutor Jeff Sauter.

"It led to a more intense approach to child abuse and neglect," he said.

For complete information on Eaton County, go to [www.milhs.org](http://www.milhs.org).

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Published June 3, 2007

## 'Kids Count' raises concerns

By MARY JO WHITE  
Lansing Community Newspapers

EATON COUNTY — There's good news and bad news for Eaton County in the annual Kids Count review recently released by the Michigan League for Human Services.

The good news is the child poverty rate and the number of teen parents are dropping; the bad news is the level of abuse and neglect is on the rise.

Kids Count is a collaborative project of MLHS and Michigan's Children and covers a wide-range of statistics on the well-being of children — including poverty rates, teen pregnancies, health issues and reports of abuse or neglect.

Child poverty rates in the county declined between 1997 and 2003, and have remained below state rates.

Births to teen mothers have dropped, too, from 127 per thousand in the three-year period of 1995-97 to 117 per thousand from 2002 through 2004.

However, perhaps the most striking piece of news contained in the report was the increase in the number of confirmed victims of abuse or neglect, from 78 per 1,000 in 1997 to over 290 per 1,000 in 2005.

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For complete information on Eaton County, go to [www.milhs.org](http://www.milhs.org).

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Lansing State Journal

Published June 4, 2007

## **Schneider: Readers get hot about youngsters left unattended in car**

Regarding my May 30 column about three young children left in a car in a store parking lot:

- From Emily Bourne of Lansing: "It breaks my heart to read this. It's completely outrageous to think that it is against the law for someone to warm up their car unattended in the winter by leaving it running - in an effort to keep their kids warm when they do get into the vehicle - while there is no mandate to protect those same children when they are left in a car unattended.

"I think the Legislature needs to make it a priority to pass this bill immediately. Who are we protecting here by not making it a law? Certainly not those three small, unattended, sweaty and frightened children."

- From Jennifer Withey of Williamston: "I want to weigh in on the issue of the irresponsible idiot who left the three children in the car on a very warm day in a crowded shopping mall parking lot.

"It amazes me that people still do this. I don't care if you're 100 yards, or half a mile, away; you don't leave young children alone, no matter what.

"If you aren't ready for the responsibility and 'inconvenience,' then don't have children until you are."

- From Ken Seelman of Grand Ledge: "This sort of thing just drives me up a wall. It's not illegal yet in Michigan to leave children unattended in cars, but isn't it worth the police coming out to take a look?

"If some other kind of neglect or abuse had been happening at home, maybe this could have been the only opportunity the kids would have to let an authority figure know what was happening at home.

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Article published Jun 1, 2007

Purchase new license plate to help a neglected child  
The Michigan Department of State

Every five Every five minutes a child is reported as the victim of abuse or neglect in Michigan.

To combat that grim statistic, Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land and Children's Trust Fund officials today introduced the newly redesigned CTF fundraising license plate.

"Our children are our most precious resource," Land said. "It is difficult to think that anyone would harm a child. When you purchase a CTF fundraising plate, you support services and programs dedicated to protecting Michigan children and help one of the state's most vulnerable populations."

The plate's brightly colored logo portrays the Upper and Lower peninsulas as green imprints of a child's hands. The hands are framed against a background of blue water and a yellow sun that are stylized as if a child had drawn them. The Children's Trust Fund name appears at the bottom in green, red and blue lettering.

Richard Bearup, Children's Trust Fund executive director, explained that targeted educational outreach and support is crucial in helping to protect the thousands of Michigan children at risk.

"Training and prevention are the keys to ending the cycle of child abuse and neglect," Bearup said. "Studies show that abused children frequently grow up to be abusers themselves. Furthermore, the societal costs of abuse - the damaged families, higher crime rates and increased burdens on the health care system - can be avoided by providing parents with the skills necessary to succeed at parenting. So, when you elect to purchase a CTF fundraising plate, you are making an investment in the success of Michigan children."

Plates may be ordered at a branch office or through the mail. Order forms are available on the Department of State Web site at [www.Michigan.gov/sos](http://www.Michigan.gov/sos). Plates are mailed within 14 days.

The CTF plate is one of seven special cause fundraising plates that were introduced in April 2001. Motorists purchasing a fundraising plate pay \$35, with \$25 of that earmarked for the special cause. The plates may be personalized for an additional \$30 and are available in a disability version. When they are renewed, \$10 is sent to the special cause.

Sales and renewals of CTF plates have generated nearly \$6 million for the Trust Fund. The money provides funding to local CTF councils to help prevent child abuse and neglect.

It also supports community-based, direct service programs that meet a diversity of needs including childhood development, home visits, parenting education and support as well as referrals.

CTF was established in 1982 by the Legislature and is the only independent, statewide, nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. For more information about CTF and its mission, visit [www.michigan.gov/ctf](http://www.michigan.gov/ctf).

Visit the Department of State Web site at [www.Michigan.gov/sos](http://www.Michigan.gov/sos) for more information about fundraising plates and vehicle registrations.

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## Possible privatizing foster care worries some, backed by others

Monday, June 04, 2007

**BARRIE BARBER**

### THE SAGINAW NEWS

Kimberly L. Rowan and her husband, Phillip, have two foster children in their Reese home, the latest of 45 youngsters who have lived with them in the past half-decade.

The 47-year-old mother, who adopted two other foster children, doesn't want her relationship with the Saginaw County Department of Human Services to change, but she worries what could happen if the Legislature passes a Senate bill that would privatize foster care.

"A lot of things look great on paper until you do them," she said. "I don't believe they are going to do any better service or save any money versus the system that's already in place."

A Senate vote on the measure could come by mid-June.

Proponents say that letting the private sector handle foster care would save \$30 million a year in budget-troubled times. However, Randy R. Barst, director of the County Department of Human Services, said another analysis shows that privatization would cost \$24 million more.

The "extreme disparity" shows that legislators should thoroughly review the idea before relying on it as a budget-cutting move, Barst said.

Moreover, he said, the proposal likely would overtax the ability of private providers to cope with an expanded caseload.

"What would we do then?" he asked. "Who would be responsible for monitoring the safety and well-being of these children?"

His department supervises about 410 foster care cases in Saginaw County. Private nonprofit providers oversee another 110, Barst said.

Robert G. Miles, chairman of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families, maintains that privatizing foster care would save money and that nonprofit private providers can meet housing needs through foster parents.

"It's a matter of given the opportunity, the private agencies will respond," said Miles, also president and chief executive officer of Lutheran Child and Family Services of Michigan in Bay City.

A takeover could occur in phases if necessary, he said, adding, "We have a long history of doing this kind of stuff."

The idea has gained headway in other states that don't face the kind of economic downturn dogging Michigan, he said.

Sen. Roger N. Kahn, a Saginaw Township Republican, said private foster care has a proven record of reducing child recidivism better than public agencies.

Barst, however, said children often spend more time in private foster care than necessary.

Kahn pointed to projections that the legislative proposal, which he said has bipartisan backing, would save millions of dollars next year, when Michigan faces a deficit greater than \$1.5 billion.

Private providers could handle more placements, he said, adding, "It isn't like we are going to be

abandoning these kids."

But Barst said the state has no guarantee private agencies would accept emotionally troubled children, and the Department of Human Services would lose direct home oversight on cases nonprofit organizations oversee, he said.

In those instances, the state would oversee the private agency worker. Today, Department of Human Services workers make direct home visits in public foster care placements, Barst said.

Miles said private nonprofit groups have national accreditation, while the human services agency does not. Private residential treatment centers deal with troubled youths already, he said, before they enter into home foster care.

"We're already providing some of those placements for kids," he said.

Barst said his agency's workers must earn licenses to practice their profession and often have more experience than private case managers.

Foster care parents attend classes to obtain licenses to care for children, Rowan said.

Privatizing might also mean that local taxpayers will pay more, Barst said, explaining that counties could end up paying half of the administrative fees on each case.

Miles said he expects legislators will find a way to come up with the money without counties spending more.  
v

Barrie Barber covers politics and government. You may reach him at 776-9725.

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06/03/2007

## The different faces of Generation Y

There was a report on the radio the other day about how some companies with a lot of employees in their 20s are instituting new recognition and rewards programs because one of the things these workers say they need is more positive feedback.

The report went on to say that these young adults are of a generation whose parents were preoccupied with imbuing self-esteem in their children. They grew up in an era of inflated grades, the report said; on their teams, everybody got a trophy.

What that has produced, the report concluded, is adults who expect and require stroking. In response, some employers are jumping on the bandwagon to meet that need.

So when, at one company with a large percent of young workers, a woman in her 40s who had been on the job for about 18 years won the company's recently instituted "Employee of the Day" award, she was dumbfounded. Why so surprised? Uh, she said, she was just doing her job, like always.

Now, with kids age 23 and 20, I am probably among the guilty here. I did think it was important to give my children positive reinforcement and a sense that they can do anything they set their minds to if they're willing to work for it. However, there is a difference between healthy self-esteem and being overly self-important/absorbed, and I'd like to think they fall into the former.

But there were times along the way that I'd stop and think about how my mother, with five kids within six years of each other, could never possibly have been as involved in her kids' lives as I was being in mine. And that wasn't what parents generally did then anyway.

Then the other day, several of us here at the Record-Eagle met with some young adults who are participating in a program to support foster kids who "age out" of the system, which is when they make the transition to adulthood once they turn 18 and no longer qualify for foster care.

The same age as my kids and their friends, most of whom have had the love and support of parents and family every step of the way, these young adults had none of that and worse. They told of being moved from foster home to foster home to foster home. Of acting out as a teen and getting into trouble and having not one single person there to advocate for them as they navigated the legal system. Of turning 18 and being homeless — not because the foster parents were heartless, necessarily, but with funding cut off and a houseful of other kids, they couldn't afford to keep one more.

These young adults aren't seeking strokes or empty recognition. They're looking to make a future for themselves, and to keep younger foster kids from running into the same obstacles they did. They're poised and well-spoken — passionate about their own futures and most definitely, on the issue of foster care.

And there's nothing superficial about that.



**By Kathy Gibbons**  
Features editor  
kgibbons@  
record-eagle.com

**Read Kathy's past  
columns here**

## Kids looking for a home

DETROIT — “What I want for myself in this life is a family . . . .”

The statement above was made by 16 year-old Danielle, who is waiting to be adopted. Many of us take being part of a family for granted.

Today in Michigan there are more than 4,000 children without families.

These children wait and hope every day for someone to adopt them and give them families of their own. Most of these children are not newborns or infants, but older children; many live with the trauma of abuse and neglect, have medical issues, or need special help.

Some of the children waiting to be adopted are featured in a photographic exhibit called the Michigan Heart Gallery on display through June 5 at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History.

The Michigan Heart Gallery features professional photos of some of Michigan’s waiting children. The photographs in the Heart Gallery were taken by dozens of professional photographers who donated their time to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system.

“While we hope children featured in the exhibit will find families, the larger goal of the Heart Gallery is to promote the idea of caring for and adopting children from the foster care system. We know from experience that if these children are not seen, and if we do not continue to educate the public about older children, who need families, then they may be forgotten,” Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services

Each year, approximately 450 Michigan children between the ages of 18 and 21, leave the foster care system because of their age.

These youths do not have a family to stand up at their wedding, a place to go home for the holidays, or a family safety net of any kind.

Another piece of the Heart Gallery is a small sampling of portraits of successful adoptive families. The Heart Gallery features three families that have opened their homes to children from the foster care system.

For more information about the Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call 800.589.6273 or visit [www.miheart.org](http://www.miheart.org)

June 4, 2007

## Love is colorblind

Black family's adoption of a white girl made national news in 1997, but they've proved family ties cross cultural divide

Francis X. Donnelly | The Detroit News

### GRAND BLANC

When teen Stacey Bush isn't making the honor roll, she's at one of two jobs, or tutoring sixth-graders, or volunteering at a soup kitchen, or supervising kids at a Boys and Girls Club.

She feels like she has something to prove, and a lot of people to prove it to.

In a 1997 case that drew national attention, a state agency tried to prevent Stacey from being adopted because of "cultural issues." She is white and her adoptive mom is black.

The adoption was approved and, for the past decade, Stacey has prospered in her new home. She has accomplished things once doubted by naysayers even as she witnessed discrimination from a rare view -- as a white adopted by a black.

"I thought I was alone, that nobody would care for me," she said about life before the adoption. "If I saw somebody like me, it would break my heart."

The adoption of whites by blacks is rare and controversial.

Of 11,000 adoptions in Michigan from 2001-05, the last year available, only 78 were blacks adopting whites. During that time, 677 whites adopted blacks.

The National Association of Black Social Workers, which has opposed biracial adoptions for 35 years, once likened it to "cultural genocide," and said it's important for children to grow up in their own culture.

"Culture is the bridge that links the present with the past, and the past with the future," according to the Washington, D.C., group's policy statement on biracial adoption. "It is a person's values, beliefs, learnings, practices and understandings."

A representative of the organization declined to discuss the subject.

But Stacey, 18, says she hasn't been hampered by cultural differences. Rather, she has blossomed.

She recently won awards for community service, finished second in the state for the Boys and Girls Club's youth of the year, won several college scholarships and plans to attend Central Michigan University in the fall.

The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Flint said Stacey is a role model because she didn't allow the controversy surrounding her adoption to stop her.

"She looked at them (challenges) as stepping stones," said Mark Serra, the group's development director. "It's just amazing to see how she handles herself."

### A life of abuse, neglect

In her short life, Stacey has known all types of parents -- biological, foster and adopted.

But, until Regina Bush, those mothers and fathers represented a litany of abuse, neglect and rejection, according to the Bushes and state records.

Her biological mother, who was schizophrenic and moved from home to home, roamed the streets with her children in a shopping cart. She scoured Dumpsters and collected bottles along highways to turn in for their deposits.

"She was crazy, but I know she loved me," Stacey said. Her mom lost contact with the rest of her family.

The state took control of the children when Stacey was 6, and she flitted in and out of foster homes. She was a hyper child who was hard to control, she said.

Regina Bush, who was in the process of adopting Stacey's biracial stepsister, decided to adopt Stacey to keep them together.

"You're talking about a child who has been through it all," Regina Bush said. "Everything you can imagine happening to a kid has happened to her."

Regina Bush had to file a federal lawsuit before receiving the state's blessing to adopt Stacey, but not before undergoing a battery of tests.

### Mom passed tests

She took psychological exams. A social worker visited her home for 10 hours to watch her interact with her children.

She was asked whether she would prepare food differently for Stacey and whether she would take a class to learn how to wash a white person's hair.

"Why would I prepare food differently?" she asked. "All my children love hamburgers and french fries."

Bush, 46, a welfare eligibility specialist with the state, is a single mom of eight. Two are biological and the others are adopted.

Bill Johnson, superintendent of the Michigan Children's Institute, which oversees state adoptions, said his agency was concerned about more than race in Bush's case.



She was a single parent with a full-time job who was taking care of five children.

He said the state weighs many factors in placing a child in a home, including race, stability of the home and willingness of the parent.

"We would try to match as best we can a child with a family that is consistent with that child's background so the child is comfortable," he said.

As for Stacey, who had moved through so many different homes before finding the welcoming arms of Bush, she didn't care that the color of those arms were different from her own.

In a lifetime of tumult, it was the best change she had ever experienced.

## **Others raised questions**

But the rest of society wasn't as colorblind.

The family drew looks and comments when they went out in public.

At Arby's, a customer asked Stacey why she was about to get into a car full of blacks -- her mom and siblings.

At school, classmates asked why she spoke and acted black. They called her a black girl in a white person's body and the blackest white girl they knew.

Instead of being hampered by a lifetime of difficulty, she used it to spur herself on. She wanted to prove wrong all the people who had given up on her.

"I want to show people I'm successful," she said. "Not money successful, but love-strength-happiness successful."

She credits her mom, a tough disciplinarian who teaches her children to stand up for themselves.

Stacey wants to help children whose lives were as difficult as her own. Toward that end, she's going to become a teacher.

As for children of her own, she wrote on her MySpace page several years ago that she didn't want any.

But she has softened her view. She can imagine the day when she might have a baby. If and when she does, she said, it would be the most-loved child in the world.

*You can reach Francis X. Donnelly at (313) 223-4186 or [fdonnelly@detnews.com](mailto:fdonnelly@detnews.com).*

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Article published Jun 2, 2007

Dental clinic to fill need

No Medicare, little insurance afflict the 'working poor'

By MIKE CONNELL  
Times Herald

Lindsay Lewis worked a full-time job, paid her bills and didn't ask for handouts. Such virtue cost her most of her teeth and very nearly her life.

"It breaks my heart," she said. "It's horrible."

Lewis, a 27-year-old mother of three, fell into a widening gap that has ensnared millions of American workers - she made too much money to qualify for Medicare and not enough to pay for dental insurance.

Her wisdom teeth grew in sideways, and the roots wrapped around the nerves that nourished her other teeth. In time, she would lose all but four teeth.

She also lost her health, her job and her self-esteem. What she never lost was hope, and she said her prayers were answered by an unexpected source - the United Way of St. Clair County.

If that agency gets its way, future Lindsay Lewises will find help long before their dental problems turn life-threatening.

## **Unwavering commitment**

A United Way-led coalition is putting together the final pieces of a 12-year effort to provide the so-called "working poor" of St. Clair County with affordable dental care. Plans include construction of a state-of-the-art, nine-chair dental clinic on Electric Avenue in Port Huron.

Tim Lubbers, the United Way's board president, credits the agency's former executive director, Lonnie Stevens, with guiding the effort through a maze of setbacks and disappointments.

"This would not be even on the drawing boards were it not for Lonnie's unwavering commitment," he said of Stevens, who's now a manager with Mueller Industries in Port Huron.

A dozen years ago, the United Way conducted a detailed assessment of community needs. It uncovered many problems, Stevens said, but none more dire than a system that left tens of thousands of local residents without access to dental care.

"We saw this terrible hole," she recalled. "People came (into emergency rooms) with terrible infections rampaging through their bodies because of a lack of dental care."

Nationally, one-third of Americans have no dental insurance, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## **'Horribly in debt'**

Finding a dentist who will accept cash isn't always easy, as Lewis discovered the day she took a bite of food and split a tooth in half.

"A dentist in Warren was the only one I could find who would take cash," she recalled. "He told me there was no flow (of nutrients) to my teeth."

He also warned it would cost \$30,000 to \$50,000 to keep her teeth from getting worse. The amount took her breath away, but she saw no alternative.

"My husband and I made too much money for Medicaid but not enough (to buy) health insurance," she said. "We went horribly in debt. My entire paycheck (at a printing company) was going to this dentist."

Her husband, Douglas, tried to pick up the slack by working overtime at his job installing drywall.

"The drywall business was booming back then, and he was working 16 hours a day," she recalled. "But his job got slower and slower until there was no work at all."

Eventually, Lewis stopped getting more dental work done. Her teeth decayed. Eating became agony. Infection spread out from her mouth.

"If that infection had kept raging through her body, those three children would have lost a mother," Stevens said.

### **'A silent epidemic'**

Lewis looked for a way out of her dilemma without success. Only eight states guarantee full dental coverage for adults, and Michigan isn't one of them. In fact, the cash-strapped state has been cutting adult benefits.

For those who do qualify for Medicaid, finding a dentist who will accept it can be daunting. Emergency rooms, often the option of last resort, can offer temporary pain relief, but they don't specialize in dentistry.

In 2000, then-Surgeon General David Satcher described oral and dental diseases as "a silent epidemic." Seven years later, the epidemic still rages.

Few things illustrate the crisis any more clearly than a Government Accountability Office study, which concluded that about one in every four reservists needs emergency dental care before being sent into combat in Iraq.

"We have an oral-hygiene epidemic," said Kris Nicholoff, assistant executive director of the Michigan Dental Association. "People take better care of their cars than they do their mouths."

He said employers and Medicaid, a joint federal-state program, need to look at dental benefits not only as primary care but as a smart investment. Diabetes, heart disease and many other illnesses have been linked to dental problems.

"A healthy body starts with a healthy mouth," he said. "People are beginning to see that it's a lot cheaper to clean teeth than to pull them. It's cheaper to maintain a healthy mouth than to fix one. (Dental benefits) save money on the medical side and keep people out of emergency rooms."

Nicholoff described Healthy Kids Dental, a private-public partnership in 59 of Michigan's 83 counties, as a model program.

"In those 59 counties, we are seeing access to care addressed for children," he said. "We need to take that template statewide and expand it to include adults."

### **United Way at its best**

Stevens, who left the United Way a month ago after 13 years as its executive director, emphasized that the new clinic isn't a welfare program.

Patients will pay for treatment using an income-based sliding scale. However, no one will be turned away because of an inability to pay.

Regular checkups are a cornerstone of dental care, and to encourage this, patients will be asked to pay in advance for their next appointment.

"Paying in advance is how we'll get you to come back," Stevens said. "Otherwise, you come in with a toothache, it's cured and you don't want to go back (for cleaning and a checkup)."

She describes the clinic as the product of a "working collaboration" that has grown to include the three local hospitals, the county health department, the dental-hygiene program at Baker College, the Visiting Nurse Association, community mental health, the city of Port Huron and Dental Clinics North, which will operate the clinic.

Stevens describes it as the archetypal United Way initiative.

"This is what the United Way is," she said. "It allows the community to come together."

## Work to be done

Several steps remain to be taken before the clinic greets its first patient.

The Visiting Nurse Association, which has moved into the 86-year-old Parfet Building in Port Huron, is donating its former building on Electric Avenue to the United Way, a gift valued at \$125,000.

The United Way plans to use its reserve fund to pay for demolishing the existing building, which is 2,000 square feet, and replacing it with a 3,200-square-foot building with a basement. The new structure will house a clinic with nine chairs and accommodations for patients with special needs.

The county health department will lease the building, with the rent payments helping to replenish the United Way's reserve funds. The health department, in turn, plans to subcontract the actual operations to Dental Clinics North, which currently operates 10 clinics in the region between Traverse City and Alpena.

The larger building became necessary after a major donor, the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan, asked that the clinic's scope be expanded to include Medicaid patients, who cannot always find a dentist willing to treat them.

Fewer than 1,000 of Michigan's 6,500 dentists will accept Medicaid patients, according to the state Department of Community Health. Dentists complain of Medicaid's burdensome paperwork and insufficient reimbursements, which pay 30% or less of what private insurers pay for the same procedures.

"Dental Medicaid in Michigan is grossly underfunded," Nicholoff said.

## Getting her life back

For someone who has gone through five years of misery, Lewis is remarkably cheerful.

Her children - Taylor, 5; Matthew, 3; and Emma-Leigh, 22 months - cluster around her during an interview at the dining-room table of their home in Port Huron Township.

Lewis looks as if a puff of wind could send her flying. She weighs 85 pounds. Maybe.

"I'm tiny," she acknowledged.

She had lost more than 40 pounds and was battling for her life when a staff member at Michigan State University Extension steered her to Charlie O'Boyle at the United Way, which has a fund for dental emergencies.

Her case was extraordinarily difficult, Lewis said, and it took months before the United Way could find a dentist - Donald Tousignant of Marysville - willing to treat her.

"They're great over there," she said of Tousignant's office. "He's the best dentist I ever saw."

Only four of her teeth can be saved, she said. She's looking forward to the day when she's fitted for full dentures on the top and partials on the bottom. She's especially eager to get back to work, perhaps as a waitress.

"Over the last few years, I went from someone who was out all the time, who worked and who was active in the kids' schools, to someone who stays at home," she said. "I look sickly. People have even asked my friends if I'm a crackhead. Life is just hard right now. I can't wait to go back to work."

With that, she smiled and offered a bit of wisdom that millions of Americans know only too well: "If you don't have insurance, you better not have teeth problems."

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## 2 teen boys break out of juvenile detention

June 2, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Police were looking Friday for two teens who escaped from a juvenile detention facility in Detroit by prying open a third-floor window and dropping to the ground below.

Thursday's escape by two 17-year-old boys is the third successful escape from the Todd Phillips Children's Home in the past year.

One of the escapees, Ernie Evans of Detroit, was awaiting trial on a charge of selling narcotics to an undercover officer. The other, John Kitchen of Detroit, had violated probation for a series of assaults and was detained because he is a possible witness to a double homicide.

The 28-bed Phillips Home takes up most of the third floor of the east wing of the Herman Kiefer Hospital complex in Detroit. The center is a private facility owned and operated by the Wolverine State Missionary Baptist Convention in Saginaw, which leases space from the City of Detroit.

The Rev. Joseph Jordan, pastor of Corinthian Baptist Church in Hamtramck, is a vice president of the Wolverine State Convention and president of the Phillips Home board.

On Friday afternoon, Jordan said he had not heard about the escape, but he remained confident that the facility is secure.

"From what I've seen, they have an excellent program," Jordan said.

Facility director Zelda Williams did not return calls seeking comment.

Since 2005, the Department of Human Services has conducted four investigations of the Phillips Home and found violations, including a youth inappropriately handcuffed for punishment and failures to prevent two previous escapes.

Last June, two youths escaped through a window and climbed down bed sheets, a state licensing report shows.

In January, two other youths escaped while staff members were putting them in a van to take them out of the facility.

*Anyone with information on the escapees can call police at 888-927-8477 anytime. Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or [jkresnak@freepress.com](mailto:jkresnak@freepress.com).*

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## Muskegon Chronicle

### Sex assault suspect's age -- 13 -- shocks police

Monday, June 04, 2007

By Terry Judd

[tjudd@muskegonchronicle.com](mailto:tjudd@muskegonchronicle.com)

Ottawa County Sheriff's officials say they cannot recall such a young person being arrested and charged with criminal sexual assault after a 13-year-old boy was arrested Saturday for raping a woman and sexually assaulting another young woman.

"It is extremely unusual," said Lt. Mark Bennett. "I cannot recall a case with a similar set of circumstances with an offender that young. It definitely is a troubling situation."

The youth was to appear this afternoon before a juvenile court referee on a charges of criminal sexual conduct, home invasion and assault with intent to commit criminal sexual conduct. During his preliminary hearing, court officials were to review the charges and determine whether the boy will remain lodged in the Ottawa County Juvenile Detention Facility. A pretrial date also was expected to be set.

The youth was arrested early Saturday afternoon shortly after an attempted sexual assault against a woman outdoors in the Forest Park subdivision. Based upon her description of her assailant, deputies located and arrested the suspect.

The boy also has been charged with raping an 18-year-old woman in her home at the River Haven Mobile Home Park earlier that morning. The suspect also lives in River Haven, which is located near Forest Park and Hofma Park.

Since the arrest, Bennett said he has received several calls from persons who saw the youth walking around the Forest Park subdivision, but he has taken no reports of other assaults. Persons with information are being asked to call Bennett at (616) 738-4003.

"People have called who said they saw a kid walking around, but that's about it at this point."

Bennett said the department is looking into the suspect's background and past criminal activities in preparation of today's preliminary hearing. The boy is not a student in the Grand Haven district, according to school officials. Additional information on the suspect was not available this morning.

According to Bennett, an 18-year-old woman was assaulted at around 10:40 a.m. Saturday after she had gone on a bicycle ride. The boy allegedly observed her returning on her bike, entered her home and physically and sexually assaulted her before fleeing. Responding sheriff's deputies called in a tracking dog but were unsuccessful in locating the boy.

But early Saturday afternoon, deputies received another call of an assault against another woman in the Forest Park Subdivision, near the township's Hofma Park. The woman, whose age was not been released, was walking near Hofma Park when she was attacked and a sexual assault was attempted.

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## White Pine pupil, 14, faces assault charge

Saturday, June 02, 2007

**COREY MITCHELL**

### THE SAGINAW NEWS

A 14-year-old student at Saginaw Township's White Pine Middle School could face probation or time in a detention facility for what prosecutors say is his role in a fight that left a classmate bloodied and unconscious on a restroom floor.

Saginaw County Prosecutor Michael D. Thomas has authorized a charge of aggravated assault against the male student, who is on indefinite suspension from school.

The teen could face a hearing in juvenile court as early as next week, said Probate Referee Dwight T. Lewis.

On May 15, police say the student and an accomplice dragged the 14-year-old victim into a school restroom, where one student pounded him unconscious.

The other student, who is 15 years old, likely will not face charges, Thomas said.

When the victim's parents arrived at White Pine the day of the attack, the boy couldn't remember their names or the days of the week, said his mother, who lives in Saginaw Township.

The boy suffered a concussion and facial lacerations. He returned to classes two days later, his memory still hazy, his mother said.

She said school officials downplayed the attack.

"The school told us it was a 'boys will be boys' kind of thing," she said last week. "It was much worse."

White Pine Principal Bonnie Eaves told The Saginaw News that the fight started over an Apple iPod someone stole from the victim. The victim accused the other student of taking it. A different youth who had snatched the music device stepped forward several days after the attack, Eaves said. v

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# Delinquency offenses

Sunday, June 03, 2007

Cases of juvenile delinquency in Midland County have dropped since 2003. Here's a look at the trend since 2000.

2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006

Adjudicated offenses 427 447 480 324 327 212

Probation violations 151 195 187 198 164 182 177

Transferred to county of residence 63 84 61 111 61 35 44

Petition dismissed 26 41 40 80 69 54 32

Waiver to adult court 8 0 0 2 15 0 0

Total charged offenses 836 842 763 896 640 673 664

SOURCE: Midland County Probate and Family Court

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Article published Jun 3, 2007

## **LOCAL: Statewide group honors court referee**

A Livingston County court referee has been honored for her service to the Referees' Association of Michigan.

Kathleen Oemke, the current association president, was given a trophy in tribute of her years of service on the association's executive board of directors, as well as her dedication to the organization. Before serving as president, Oemke served as vice president and chair of the awards committee.

The award was presented to Oemke on May 25 at the association's annual state conference, held this year in Petoskey, Michigan.

Oemke, a Livingston County resident for more than 27 years, worked as an attorney in private practice until 1997, when she was appointed Friend of the Court referee by the Livingston County circuit and probate judges. She served in that capacity for seven years.

She was appointed by the Family Court judges to be the Juvenile Court referee in 2004. Her job includes dealing with juvenile delinquents and making recommendations for their rehabilitation. She also presides in the Juvenile Drug Treatment Court.

Oemke also stood as a nonpartisan candidate for probate judge in 2006, finishing third in a seven-person primary election.

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Published June 4, 2007

## Hard times, hungry families: Feeble economy driving more people to food banks

Andrea Byl  
Lansing State Journal

CHARLOTTE - Cynthia Combs didn't know how she'd feed her family of four with a paycheck still more than a week away.

Her cupboards were down to only a few items.

It was a reality that recently brought Combs back to Helping Hands of Eaton County Food Pantry, which she said she visits about once a year when things get too tight.

"It will definitely help," the Potterville woman said, explaining that her husband's job doesn't offer insurance. And recent health issues - coupled with her daughter, Shana Lee, and granddaughter, Sage, moving in - made making ends meet a challenge.

The Combs family is not alone.

More tricity residents are choosing between paying rent and filling the fridge, spurring an increase in the need for programs for the hungry in mid-Michigan.

More than 34.5 million meals were provided to hungry people in Ingham, Clinton and Eaton counties in 2006, according to the Food Bank Council of Michigan.

That reflects an increase of more than



(Photo by ROBERT KILLIPS/Lansing State Journal)  
Getting by: Shana Lee (from left) and daughters, Sage, 4, and Samantha, 11, get ready for a meal as grandmother Cynthia Combs turns hot dogs on the grill. Lee and Sage moved into the Combses' Potterville mobile home for financial reasons.

### To donate

#### Prepared food

- The Food Movers program rescues as much as 50,000 pounds of prepared and perishable food and delivers it to community kitchens, low-income housing complexes and shelters.

- Contact: Sharon Krinock at 887-4307

#### Packaged food

Distribution centers in mid-Michigan always are looking for contributions.

- The Greater Lansing Food Bank:

P. O. Box 16224, Lansing, MI 48901. For a list of items needed and other information, visit [www.lansingfoodbank.org](http://www.lansingfoodbank.org).

- The American Red Cross Regional Distribution Center: Mid-Michigan Chapter

1800 E. Grand River Ave.

P. O. Box 30101

Lansing, MI 48909-7601 or call 484-7461, ext. 325

- 211 Food Pantry and Kitchen help line:

The 24-hour line functions like 911 from all land lines. From cell phones and pay phones call (866) 561-2500. The

100 percent since 2000 in Clinton and Eaton counties. The data were not immediately available for Ingham County's 112 food pantries.

call also will help locate other local services.

Source: Capital Area United Way

Helping Hands of Eaton County alone served more than 550,000 meals in 2006, a far cry from what the mission thought it would be dealing with when it opened in 1982.

"We thought we'd be in business a short time to get (the community) through the recession," said Pam Huffman, director of the food bank.

Huffman said the downward swing in Michigan's economy is a key factor.

"People aren't just sitting around waiting for a handout," she said. "The situation is running so rampant, I don't know if we'll ever see it go away."

Kathe DeMara Smith, operations supervisor for the American Red Cross Distribution Center in Lansing, said clients are primarily working poor.

"The old thought is that the people who visited food banks were the non-working poor," she said, "but now it's people who are both working and suffering, often from high costs of health insurance, keeping the car running, gas prices."

Combs said her husband works an average of 10-hour days. She has a part-time job.

"We're right on the line," she said. "We make too much money to get help, but not enough to get the things we need."

But the Combses worry about health problems. "If we have to go to the hospital, we'll be in debt over our eyeballs," she said.

### **Nationwide problem**

DeMara Smith said hunger isn't just a Michigan problem.

Across the country, more than 25.3 million people - roughly one in nine Americans - receive food assistance, according to America's Second Harvest Network, a national hunger-relief charity. That number has grown 18 percent since 1997, when 21.4 million Americans were affected by hunger.

Daniel Kunkleman has struggled to stay on his feet since he lost a disability case last year. He said he's seen the Rescue Mission on Michigan Avenue in Lansing grow busier over the last three or four years.

"Once the food is gone for the month, I rely on the community kitchens," he said as he enjoyed a smelt lunch recently.

The growing need for food spurred the Capital Area United Way to start a 24-hour phone line this year that helps callers locate local food banks, food kitchens and other services, said Suzanne Eman-Jaehnig, senior associate director.

### **\$1 can provide 14 meals**

Eman-Jaehnig compared the 211 service to 911; all people have to do is dial the three digits and they are connected.

"Supposedly, from a community our size we should be getting 100 calls a day," she said, adding that the line, which launched at the end of March, received nearly 500 calls in April.

"There is just a wealth of food out there in this community. No one should be going hungry," Eman-Jaehnig said.

Jane Marshall, director of the Food Bank Council of Michigan, said for every dollar donated about 14 meals can be provided.

Combs said the community pulls together when times are lean - and that's what helps her get through the tough times.

"When (friends and neighbors) have nothing, they'll sit down with someone else who has nothing," Combs said.

"We joke about it and say, 'At least our last meal is together.' "

Contact Andrea Byl at 377-1061 or [abyl@lsj.com](mailto:abyl@lsj.com).

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## Paid not to work

### Supplemental Security Income program rules often discourage qualifiers from seeking employment..

By Jerry Wolffe

Journal Register News Service

There's a disabled man in Troy with a master's degree and a counseling license who fears he isn't able to work enough to support himself, and will lose his Social Security benefits and end up destitute if he does.

So, he doesn't work.

But he and thousands of others in Oakland County -- and millions in the nation -- already are living below the poverty line if they receive Supplemental Security Income.

SSI is a needs-based program that provides \$623 a month to anyone who has incurred a disability before age 22, a Social Security expert said Friday in a seminar at the Macomb/Oakland Regional Center.

The maximum yearly SSI payment is \$7,467 a year -- well below the government's \$9,570 poverty level for an individual.

"If it's not logical to you, it's logical to the Social Security Administration," said Paul Landry, the director of employment programs for United Cerebral Palsy of Metropolitan Detroit.

At MORC, which provides services to 4,500 disabled people in the two counties, Landry explained rules regarding Social Security Disability Income and outlined the guidelines for those who receive SSI and work.

If a disabled person earns more than \$900 a month, they are considered substantially gainfully employed and are not eligible for SSI benefits, he said.

"SSI was never meant as a lifetime benefit," said Landry of Commerce Township. "It was designed to help assist you until you are able to work."

The Social Security program was started by President Franklin D. Roosevelt when he signed the Social Security Act of 1935 as part of his New Deal to pull the nation out of the Depression.

Landry said he finds it a "problem that people don't work because of a lack of knowledge about work incentives" available to them when they receive SSI.

But, he added, gainful employment is "not the only way to be a productive member of society."

Supplemental Security Income is a federal program in which recipients must send their paychecks to the government if they are employed, to prove they are not exceeding the income level of \$900 a month.

A recipient also must give up his or her financial privacy and is required to provide a written report to the Social Security Administration "for every dollar" they receive in SSI, Landry said.

To qualify for the program, a disabled individual "cannot have more than \$2,000 in the bank or investments, and is allowed one car and a house," he said.

An SSI recipient, if employed and not earning more than \$900 a month, can deduct work-related expenses such as costs to support a guide or service dog or a job coach.

However, the amount of SSI received each month is reduced, based on a complicated formula, for every \$1 a recipient receives.

In one example, an SSI recipient's \$623 benefit was reduced by \$157.50 a month to \$465.50 because he or she earned \$400 in that month. Their total income for the month, however, was \$865.50, meaning the worker gained only \$242.50 before taxes for working.

The higher the income, the more the SSI benefit is reduced.

As far as trying to "get on SSI or SSDI, I tell people to apply, apply, apply," Landry said. "There has to be a way."

The amount of Social Security Disability Income someone receives varies depending upon the amount of money that person earned while working and how much FICA they paid.

If someone is receiving SSDI -- a federal insurance program for those who become disabled and can no longer work -- they have no medical coverage for at least two years unless it is privately purchased, Landry said.

SSDI recipients must receive two years of SSDI checks before they are eligible to apply to the Department of Human Services for Medicaid, he said.

"One of the key things I do is that I show people what would happen if they chose to work instead of staying on SSI," Landry said. "It's up to the individual whether they want to work."

But unless a disabled person can earn much more than \$900 a month and receive employer-provided medical insurance, they're financially better off living in poverty on the public dole.

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Article published Jun 2, 2007

## Ohio county kicks off gas card giveaway

LUCAS COUNTY, Ohio - A program that helps needy families buy gas to get to their jobs kicks off in the Toledo area today, but Michigan drivers won't get the same benefit.

Lucas County's Department of Job and Family Services is launching its gas card program, offering eligible families up to \$200 to help ease the high prices at the pump.

Officials say the program, which paid out nearly \$900,000 in cards to 5,000 applicants last year, is aimed to keep Ohioans at work without the worry of the extra expense.

"It's a program that helps with that dependence," director Deb Ortiz-Florez said. "One of the biggest barriers to employment is housing; the second is transportation. Hopefully the cards can help people through the summer with that."

However, Michigan officials say that needy Monroe County residents are not offered the same type services. The state's Department of Human Services offers another similar assistance program that helps needy workers to buy or repair their vehicles, instead.

"Our goal here is to help people toward self-sufficiency," Monroe County DHS director Terrence Beurer said. "We're trying to promote and increase that with our program."

Both programs are paid through the federally funded Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. Under that program, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services gives local providers flexibility to tailor services to the specific needs of certain areas.

Mr. Beurer said the goal of self-sufficiency in employment drives the program that is offered in Monroe County.

In Lucas County, Ms. Ortiz-Florez said that more needy residents have troubles paying to drive the long distances sometimes required to get to their jobs.

"It's tough and a lot of people are driving to the west end of Toledo or up into Michigan to find work," she said. "It gets to be a hardship when you have to pay these prices to do that."

Under the Lucas County program, applicants have to prove residency and must have a minor child in the household or be a non-custodial parent paying child support.

Eligibility also hinges on working at least 20 hours per week.

Applicants have to prove a family income of 200 percent or less of the poverty level. That equates to a monthly income of \$2,282 in a household of two or \$4,022 in a household of five.

Recipients may be awarded up to \$200 in gas cards to be used at Speedway gas stations. The program runs through the month of June, with an application deadline of June 29.

Ms. Ortiz-Florez said that 400 people had already dropped off applications at the department office on Thursday, a day before the program kicked off.

She said that several other Ohio counties are doing a similar program. Unlike Michigan, where the state controls what programs are offered in every county, each Ohio county runs its own independent program and can choose what services to offer.

For more information on the Lucas County program, call the Department of Job and Family Services at 419-213-8085.

To learn more about services offered in the State of Michigan, call the Monroe County Department of Human Services at 243-7200.

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## Nonprofits using loans to plug gaps

Monday, June 04, 2007

By Christina Hildreth

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The shoestring many nonprofits survive on has gotten even slimmer -- particularly for those that rely heavily on state funds to make payroll or keep the lights on.

Earlier this month, the state Department of Human Services said it would not make payments on state contracts with area providers for 45 days because of the \$800 million hole in the state budget.

For Dochas II, a Jackson childrens' counseling agency, it meant the organization couldn't make payroll.

Dochas II counsels about 65 at-risk Jackson children, visiting kids in their homes to prevent truancy and runaways. The 1-year-old agency's budget of about \$290,000 is 100 percent state-funded.

Jane Meyers, executive director for Dochas II, turned to Ken Toll, executive director of the United Way. Within 24 hours, Toll and his board of directors approved a \$10,000 emergency loan.

"I never dreamed we'd be turning to them for support for our payroll," Myers said.

Dochas II is the third nonprofit group to receive an emergency loan from the United Way of Jackson County since September 2006.

Bob Powell, executive director of Florence Crittenton Services, which provides housing and counseling to homeless children and is 80 percent state funded, said the state was "months and months" behind in reimbursements last summer. After his group lost \$70,000 in state funding, it received a \$20,000 loan from the United Way in September. Florence Crittenton has since closed a facility and laid off seven of its 50 employees.

The Jackson School of the Arts, which runs after-school programs for low-income children, received a lump-sum advance of its annual \$6,000 United Way allotment last November. The school expected to receive \$7,500 of competitive grant money for after-school programs, but Gov. Jennifer Granholm placed a moratorium on arts funding.

"The real challenge is that the money had already been spent," said Kim Hastings, the school's executive director. "With so many nonprofits, you don't have a savings account that we can dip into for things like that."

The three groups are trying to diversify their funding to rely less on the state, but money everywhere is drying up. The United Way itself cut regular funding to Florence Crittenton and the School of the Arts.

Florence Crittenton took a 40 percent cut in its United Way allotment for the 2006-2009 funding cycle, and the School of the Arts now receives \$6,000 a year less than before.

Toll defended the reductions in regular allotments to Florence Crittenton and the School of the Arts, saying the cuts -- agreed upon by

both parties -- weren't what created the organizations' crises.



"Had we awarded them more this past spring, they would have been spending that much more all along, and they'd be in the same place today," he said. The real problem is the state failing to honor contracts, he said.

Greg Bird, state budget office spokesman, said officials carefully considered contractual obligations when deciding how to cope with the state's financial difficulties. There were many cases where the state delayed payment as long as possible, but officials tried to honor any contractual obligations, he said.

"It's unfortunate we had to make these delays," he said. "We realize in many organizations that caused some financial strife, but as a state we had to get our fiscal house in order."

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## Campaigns pay more attention to poverty

June 4, 2007

BY MIKE DORNING

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

WASHINGTON -- For more than two years, John Edwards has focused on the plight of poor and working class people, joining strikers on picket lines, campaigning for an increase in the minimum wage and, before he officially launched his presidential campaign, working part time at a poverty center he founded.

Edwards speaks of poverty as "the great moral issue of our time." He has committed to a plan that he says will eliminate poverty in 30 years. The nation's response to its 37 million poor people, he said in a speech last year, "says everything about the character of America."

Poverty once held an important place in Democratic presidential politics. But since the 1960s, leading presidential candidates generally haven't focused on the plight of the poor as a central issue, though Jesse Jackson's campaigns in 1984 and 1988 were an exception.

"Sen. Edwards was very gutsy to do what he's done. Certainly, he's done it against the conventional wisdom of nearly all Democratic strategists," said Robert Borosage, who was issues director for Jackson's campaigns and is codirector of the liberal Campaign for America's Future.

"Political consultants will tell you that poor people don't vote and middle-class people, when they're feeling squeezed, aren't generous."

After the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster -- when the public recoiled at televised images of poor, mostly black residents of New Orleans' neighborhoods left to fend for themselves as floodwaters covered the city -- the predicament of the poor suddenly, if perhaps temporarily, moved to the center of the national consciousness.

Still, in its early months, the presidential campaign has concentrated on other issues, as the war in Iraq, immigration and health care have dominated political discussion.

Republican presidential candidates have their own plans for energizing the economy. But Republicans and conservatives often argue that far-reaching welfare programs breed dependency, hurting poor people in the long run, and that the best way to lift people out of poverty is to create a robust economy that provides jobs and opportunities for people who need them.

Peter Edelman, a former aide to Robert Kennedy who quit the Clinton administration in protest over welfare reform, sees evidence of poverty re-emerging as a national concern.

"There's a rising concern in the country about inequality," he said. "There's concern about giveaways to the really wealthy, and there's concern about economic insecurity. The poverty issue is embedded in that."

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## **Governor: No One Leaves Until This Is Done**

MIRS, June 1, 2007

(MACKINAC ISLAND) — At her annual address to the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce today, Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** urged business executives to push and support lawmakers as the state moves to resolve its fiscal crisis and replace the Single Business Tax (SBT).

"I would ask all of those who are legislators, or close to legislators, physically or emotionally, that no one goes on summer vacation until we get this done," Granholm said.

Clearly aware of the growing tension among business leaders and the public, Granholm began her remarks with a serious and somber tone — noting that when her office began planning her annual remarks at the conference she thought they'd be addressing One D and the new marketing strategy for Detroit.

"We can't do any of that as a state until we get this budget solved," she said. "If I could do this by myself, I would do it. This will be done but we need your help in implementing it."

What was new in her remarks was an apparent openness to reforms that appear to include pooling for health care benefits in the local government and education arena as well as moving on teacher retirement reform. She also signaled that she's open to Public Act 312 reforms in binding arbitration that some municipalities have argued are a hindrance to consolidated services.

But, she warned the audience, state and locals must stand by promises of retirement and health benefits made to current and past workers.

Addressing the charge that she's unwilling to tackle certain issues, such as benefit pooling, because of the positions of her political allies, such as the Michigan Education Association, Granholm said that must be put aside.

"We've got to put all of that aside," Granholm said. "This is not about politics, this is about the future of the state. We need to recognize that these are tough calls, changes need to happen."

During the question-and-answer period, Granholm fielded a specific question about moving teachers to defined contribution (401K type) retirement plans from defined benefit (pension like) plans. She said she supports that option, but warned

just as House Speaker Andy **DILLON** (D-Redford Twp.) did on Thursday that there are upfront costs to the state, noting it would cost \$157 million to close out the defined benefit system.

On her list of reforms she supports, in addition to retirement and health care benefit changes, were:

- Moving toward local government and school district consolidations by encouraging service coordination with both a carrot-and-stick approach
  - Being strategic about identifying inmates that are no longer a danger
  - Reforming Public Act 312, an act that requires local units that merge services to utilize the richest collective bargaining agreement when merging services.
- Granholtz said she's open to reforms that include tightening timelines and other changes.

Granholtz built her remarks around the report issued by her emergency financial advisory panel, which made its report in early February of this year (See "**Panel's Broad Message Taken Statewide**," 2/2/07). That panel, chaired by former Govs. William **MILLIKEN** and James **BLANCHARD** recommended the state pursue a fiscal solution that included reforms, cuts and new revenues.

This afternoon the Governor repeated her arguments that she's already cut state government more than any governor in the history of the state. She also outlined the state's financial structure, noting that 86 percent of the General Fund (that portion she and lawmakers control) is dedicated to human services, corrections and education.

After outlining cuts and reforms, she turned to her argument for revenue increases, the third path outlined by her advisory panel. She told business leaders that the clock, the constitution and the size of the deficit leave only two revenue paths — a hike in the income tax and/or a tax on high services such as tanning, or golf memberships.

"It's the last thing anyone wants to do," Granholtz explained, noting that the reforms she outlined will have long-term benefits, but cuts and reforms combined will only save the state \$300 million — leaving a \$1.5 billion deficit for fiscal year (FY) 2008."

The Governor did suggest she'd be open to provisions that would claw back hikes in the income tax should certain "economic triggers" be met, such as the state achieving unemployment parity with the nation as a whole. She did tell *MIRS* after

her remarks that she wasn't interested in a time-limited revenue enhancement because the state would wind up right back where it is today.

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# The Daily Telegram

[Print Page](#)

**MONDAY JUNE 4, 2007** Last modified: *Friday, June 1, 2007 8:48 AM EDT*

## EDITORIAL

Budget fix buys time but neglects real cuts

At issue: Michigan's 2007 budget deficit fix.

Our view: Although full of accounting gimmicks, the Legislature's plan bought time to finally reform state spending.

Critics describe Michigan's 2007 budget deal passed this week as "a gimmick," "a band-aid" and "passing the buck."

The terms fit. Yet, at the same time, "necessary" also applies.

Michigan needed an immediate solution to its \$800 million deficit for the current fiscal year. Otherwise, further downgrades in the state's credit rating would have cost residents even more — and Gov. Jennifer Granholm might have carried out her ill-advised threat to slash school funding by \$122 per student and Medicare payments by 6 percent.

That the budget was balanced without resorting to Granholm's draconian steps exposes those for the grandstanding they were. Credit should go to Rep. Dudley Spade, D-Tipton, Rep. Mike Simpson, D-Liberty Twp., and Sen. Cameron Brown, R-Fawn River Twp., for helping approve a better solution than Gov. Granholm proposed.

Still, this last-minute deal remains troubling for many reasons:

- The state's accounting tricks and one-time fixes are virtually exhausted, leaving few options for genuine emergencies in the future.
- The deal does nothing for the projected \$1.6 billion shortfall for the fiscal year that starts in October, except make it worse. That's because borrowing from one fund — rather than cutting spending — carries a long-term price. For example, depleting cash reserves four years ago is costing Michigan at least \$250 million per year in finance charges and lost interest. Likewise, selling Michigan's future tobacco settlement monies now reduces how much revenue it might have received later.
- Legislators knew for six months that a deficit solution was needed, but the House in particular waited too long to offer a detailed fix. It did, however, spend time trying to hike state garbage fees by 3,452 percent, offering lawyers open season on pharmaceutical companies, and debating regulations on dog bites, school bullying and tomato labeling.
- Although the House did introduce a plan to cut lifetime health benefits for future representatives, it still hasn't passed similar reforms such as those we called for back on March 11 for all public employees. Reducing benefits for your successors — especially if they might be your future challengers — is hardly a sacrifice.
- Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, reportedly promised to allow a vote on an income tax increase next year. That's unfortunate because Michigan's income tax already is higher than in neighboring Indiana

and Illinois.

Contrary to some claims, Michigan spending is still rising. Estimates for the fiscal 2007 general fund expenditures are around \$8.8 billion. Meanwhile, according to the Governor's Executive Budget Recommendation, spending for fiscal 2008 would be \$9.6 billion, a hike of almost 9.2 percent despite the worst unemployment in the U.S.

Plenty of fat is evident in Michigan spending, and lawmakers need to cut it: state computer contracts that balloon from \$58 million to \$555 million; non-competitive healthcare contracts for many state education employees; defined-benefit retirement plans that need switching to the defined-contribution model most private businesses use; a Michigan Child Support Enforcement System management contract that swelled from \$5.6 million to \$200 million over 40 months. And that doesn't begin to address savings options such as a part-time Legislature.

Michigan has bought itself a sliver of time at considerable cost to taxpayers. It must not stall any longer in bringing state spending into line with what recession-battered state taxpayers and businesses already are paying.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--

## **Speaker Pelosi Hosts Summit on Childhood Development and Early Learning**

On May 22, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) hosted the National Summit on America's Children, a forum for various experts to share scientific data about childhood development and early learning. The daylong meeting, whose goal was to ensure that federal policies affecting children are informed by sound research, was co-chaired by Reps. George Miller (D-Calif.), Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), and Chaka Fattah (D-Pa.). The summit also highlighted children's initiatives that House Democrats plan to prioritize, including Head Start and Early Head Start; the Education Begins at Home Act; enhancing early childhood workforce qualifications through the Higher Education Reauthorization Act; expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program; restoration of funds that have been cut from child support enforcement; and affordable housing. Presenters and panelists included Pat Levitt of Vanderbilt University Medical Center; Dolores Norton of the University of Chicago; Charles Nelson of Harvard Medical School; Jack Shonkoff, director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University; Karen Ponder, former president of the North Carolina Partnership for Children; Paul Wise of Stanford University; Carol Wilson Spigner of the University of Pennsylvania; and J. Lawrence Aber of New York University. The event's keynote speaker was Nobel Laureate James Heckman, a professor of economics at the University of Chicago.

The summit was organized around four panels covering the science of early childhood development, early learning, health and mental health, and income and family support. The panels focusing on early development and learning delivered consistent evidence that high-quality early care and intervention programs foster healthy physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development, particularly among disadvantaged children and their parents. The panel on health and mental health included presentations on the needs of children and families involved in the child welfare system and military families. The final panel included discussions on food insecurity and income supports for families. More information, including an archived video from the summit, will be available at <http://speaker.gov/issues?id=0032>.

## **Congress Approves Supplemental Spending Measure with SCHIP Shortfall Funds**

On May 24, Congress approved a fiscal year 2007 \$120 billion supplemental spending package (H.R. 2206) that White House and congressional negotiators had agreed to earlier in the week. President Bush has indicated he will sign the bill into law shortly. While most of the measure's funding is war-related, it also has a number of domestic provisions including \$650 million to address shortfalls in the State Children's Health Insurance Program for FY 2007. It also imposes a one-year moratorium on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services prohibiting the agency from finalizing or otherwise implementing the proposed rule that addresses cost limits for public providers and related issues (CMS 2258-P) and from issuing any similar regulation. In addition, the bill would impose a one-year moratorium that prohibits the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid from issuing or implementing any regulation that would restrict Medicaid reimbursement for Graduate Medical Education. However, on May 25, CMS put on public display at the *Federal Register* a rule intended to implement the final regulation on CMS 2258-P before



the spending measure is signed into law. The rule is scheduled for formal publication in the *Federal Register* on May 29. Some observers believe that, as currently written, the statutory language would still prevent the administration from implementing the regulation.

Unlike an earlier version of the measure vetoed by Bush, this bill does not include supplemental funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program or funds for pandemic flu preparations. The spending measure does include an increase to the minimum wage, which would rise in increments to \$7.25 by 2009. It also includes a package of business tax cuts that contains an extension of the work opportunity tax credit. The text of the provisions is available at [http://www.rules.house.gov/110/special\\_rules/hr2206\\_senate/hr2206\\_amnd1\\_senate.pdf](http://www.rules.house.gov/110/special_rules/hr2206_senate/hr2206_amnd1_senate.pdf).

### Harkin Introduces Food Stamp Benefit Legislation

On May 24, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, introduced a bill (S. 1529) to improve Food Stamp Program benefits. The bill, titled the Food Stamp Fairness and Benefit Restoration Act, is cosponsored by Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.). It would index the standard deduction for all families to the inflation rate; eliminate the cap on child care deductions; provide increases indexed to inflation for the current asset limit of \$2,000 (\$3,000 for households with elderly or disabled members); and exclude retirement and savings accounts from the asset limit. S. 1529 would also eliminate the five-year residency requirement for legal immigrants and make them eligible for benefits regardless of their date of entry into the country; change the current eligibility restrictions for able-bodied adults without dependents from the current limit of three months in every 36 months to six months in every 24 months; and increase annual purchases for the Emergency Food Assistance Program from \$140 million to \$180 million. The bill text will be posted at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>.

### USDA Releases Legislative Language for Administration's Food Stamp Proposals

On May 25, the U.S. Department of Agriculture posted legislative language that spells out its proposals for reauthorization of the FSP. The language tracks the general farm bill proposals released by the administration in its FY 2008 budget package (see *This Week*, Feb. 2). The FSP eligibility provisions in the proposal include exclusion of education and retirement accounts from eligibility determination; exclusion of combat-related military pay; elimination of the cap on dependent care deductions; and a limitation on categorical eligibility to just those participants receiving cash benefits from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program or Supplemental Security Income. The categorical eligibility change would exclude Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program participants who now receive non-cash benefits or services. USDA also proposes several changes that would affect state quality control and claims activities, including a plan to assess states 5 percent of their administrative costs if a state is more than 50 percent above the national negative error rate for two consecutive years. The legislation would also remove the new investment option for states sanctioned for improper payments for three consecutive years and prohibit states from establishing and

collecting claims for state-caused overissuances due to “widespread systemic errors.” The proposal also has provisions to change the program’s name to the Food and Nutrition Program; tighten penalties and exclusions for retailers guilty of trafficking and other violations; and provide \$100 million over five years for competitive grants targeted at the rising rates of obesity. The language is available at <http://www.usda.gov/documents/FBNutrition2007.doc>.

#### Briefing Assesses Competitiveness of Low-Income Workers

On May 18, a briefing was held at the U.S. Capitol on how states are helping American workers and employers compete and how federal policy can help. The Innovation and Opportunity event was hosted by the Center for Law and Social Policy, the Workforce Alliance, and the Working Poor Families Project. One of five policy panelists was Shauna King-Simms, director of college and career transitions with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. She discussed the effects the Deficit Reduction Act and subsequent TANF program interim final rules will likely have on Kentucky’s Ready-to-Work program. RtW offers TANF recipients a path to academic success and self-sufficiency through training and education that will help them compete in the labor market. The definition of allowable education leading to employment for TANF recipients in the Deficit Reduction Act interim final rules excludes some post-secondary education programs. This limiting factor could negatively affect RtW participants’ ability to get good jobs and get off the welfare rolls. For additional information on the RtW program or additional resources on DRA implementation, visit <http://www.kctcs.edu/readytowork/> and <http://www.clasp.org/publications.php?id=2>.

#### Briefing Held on Education Begins at Home Act

On May 23, a Senate briefing was held on the Education Begins at Home Act, S. 667 and H.R. 2343. Speakers included Sen. Christopher Bond (R-Mo.); Brenda Jones Harden of the University of Maryland; Milena Gostanian of the Critterton Women’s Union in Massachusetts; Cornelius Pierce, a Parents as Teachers program participant; and Sheriff Jim Cashell of Gallatin County, Montana. EBAH establishes dedicated funding to support home visitation programs for parents of young children at the state and local levels. These programs offer a range of services to parents of children from birth to age 5 that help to provide them with guidance on health, early development and early learning. Outcome analyses of quality home visitation programs have shown they can improve parenting practices, enhance pre-natal and infant health, increase school readiness and early achievement, and reduce incidences of abuse and neglect. EBAH was cosponsored by Sens. Bond and Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), and by Reps. Danny Davis (D-Ill.) and Todd Platts (R-Pa.) in the House. The bill has been referred to the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee in the Senate, and to the House Education and Labor Committee.

#### APHSA and NASMD Submit Comments on Changes to Provider Tax Program

On May 22, the American Public Human Services Association and its affiliate, the National Association of State Medicaid Directors, submitted formal comments on the proposed CMS-2275-P rule issued by CMS that would make significant changes to the health care-related tax program. The agency was required to issue the rule in response to changes Congress approved last year in the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-432) to temporarily lower the permissible provider tax rate from 6 percent to 5.5 percent and codify other provisions of the provider tax program. AHPHA and NASMD argue that CMS has asserted broad new authority exceeding the statutory language approved by Congress. Based on states' analysis, the proposed changes are likely to upend existing federal regulations and guidance that have allowed state to develop a clear understanding of permissible provide tax programs. The three major issues raised in the AHPHA/NASMD letter include:

- States may be required to dismantle, or, at a minimum, invest significant time newly reviewing and seeking re-approval for existing health care-related taxes;
- The re-interpretation of the definitions of "positive correlation," "Medicaid payment" and "direct guarantee" standards removes consistency and clarity in interpretation and application; and
- CMS has exceeded its authority by proposing regulatory language that Congress previously has rejected and which also goes beyond the congressionally approved health care-related statutory language set forth in the Medicaid Voluntary Contribution and Provider-Specific Tax Amendments of 1991 (P.L. 102-234) and Section 403 of the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-432).

The comment letter can be found at [http://www.nasmd.org/Home/home\\_news.asp](http://www.nasmd.org/Home/home_news.asp).

#### NASMD Releases Responses from Medicare-Related Surveys

NASMD has released the results of a Medicare-related survey conducted in March and April of this year. The survey focuses on reimbursement to states for Part D claims, the Medicare Savings Program and state policies for covering Part D excluded or non-formulary drugs. The survey is intended to facilitate information-sharing across states about the early impact of the Medicare Part D prescription drug program and state Medicaid agencies' policies for related coverage and assistance for dually eligible individuals. Thirty-two states and the District of Columbia provided responses to this survey. Among the most pressing issues identified by states at the time the survey was conducted was failure of CMS to fully reimburse states for drug and administrative expenses they incurred during the transition period to Medicare Part D for dually eligible individuals in 2006. The findings of the report include:

- Nine states reported outstanding administrative cost claims, ranging from \$131,088 to \$17,654.

- Fifteen states reported outstanding drug cost claims, ranging from \$11 million to approximately \$40,000.

- Nine states reported they were still working with Part D plans to reconcile non-low-income-subsidy costs incurred during the initial problems experienced with Part D.

Some states have implemented new policies to coordinate with Part D plans, and two states are working with an outside entity to reconcile claims with Part D plans.

Nineteen states reported an increase in enrollment in their MSP since the start of the Part D program. Three states attributed this directly to the new prescription drug subsidy and associated outreach efforts. Eighteen states reported enrollment increases, but could not determine whether the increase was attributable to the low-income subsidy.

This report coincides with the hearings being undertaken by various House and Senate committees in this Congress. Specifically, the committees are examining the Part D prescription drug benefit and programs available to assist low-income individuals with their Medicare costs. In addition, NASMD has worked with CMS to establish a State Coordinating Committee. Via monthly conference calls, the SCC addresses questions and challenges experienced by state agencies impacted by the Part D program. The survey results can be found on NASMD's Medicare Part D information clearinghouse at [http://www.nasmd.org/issues/partD\\_resources.asp](http://www.nasmd.org/issues/partD_resources.asp).

#### Kate Houston Named to USDA Nutrition Post

On May 25, USDA announced that Kate Houston will be named as deputy undersecretary for food, nutrition and consumer Services. Houston joined the Food and Nutrition Service in October 2006 and has worked on a variety of nutrition program issues, including drafting the nutrition title in the administration's farm bill proposal. Her earlier work includes a staff position with the House Education and Labor Committee. The position was formerly held by Kate Coler, who left earlier this year to join the staff of the Senate Agriculture Committee.



STATE OF MICHIGAN

JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW  
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# News Release

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## **Child support program distributions up \$14 million in the first half of 2007**

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**June 4, 2007**

LANSING – The Department of Human Services' Office of Child Support collected and distributed more than \$705 million in Title IV-D child support owed to Michigan families during the first half of fiscal year 2007, an increase of \$14 million over the same period in 2006.

"The importance of this money to families cannot be overstated," said Marilyn Stephen, director of the Office of Child Support. "The Office of Child Support, friends of the court and prosecutors will continue to make every effort to make sure families have the funds to buy the groceries and pay the bills."

In the first six months, \$643 million was paid directly to families in Michigan, \$18 million was distributed to cover medical costs for children and \$44 million was collected to reimburse taxpayers for public assistance provided to families. Another \$18 million was distributed to families in other states whose child support case is under the jurisdiction of a Michigan court.

More than 90 percent child support payments are sent to families within 24 hours of receipt by the state. The rest is held as required by law or distributed once addresses for custodial parents can be found. Today, 57 percent of child support disbursements are deposited directly into customer bank accounts and almost 37 percent are electronically deposited to customer debit cards. Fewer payments are delayed for lack of a current mailing address with electronic disbursement.

"The child support program provides vital services to Michigan families," DHS Director Marianne Udow said. "The program's performance in these times of diminished resources demonstrates our employees' commitment to those families. Making sure that vital services remain available will continue to be a priority for DHS."

For more information go to [www.michigan.gov/childsupport](http://www.michigan.gov/childsupport)

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